



Raymond, G. (2017). Beyond left and right? *Modern and Contemporary France*, 25(4), 417-428.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09639489.2017.1375650>

Peer reviewed version

Link to published version (if available):
[10.1080/09639489.2017.1375650](https://doi.org/10.1080/09639489.2017.1375650)

[Link to publication record in Explore Bristol Research](#)
PDF-document

This is the author accepted manuscript (AAM). The final published version (version of record) is available online via Wiley at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09639489.2017.1375650> . Please refer to any applicable terms of use of the publisher.

University of Bristol - Explore Bristol Research

General rights

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the reference above. Full terms of use are available:
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-policy/pure/user-guides/ebr-terms/>

Beyond Left and Right?

Gino Raymond

University of Bristol, Bristol, UK.

Abstract

The end of the left-right divide is something which has been pronounced with growing regularity over the last 30 years or so. Emmanuel Macron's victory in the presidential election and the majority obtained by his party, La République en Marche, in the parliamentary election, would seem to confirm that development. This article analyses, in the first instance, the failure of traditional parties of left and right to adapt to the transformation of their respective electorates and, consequently, the declining appeal of what was on offer politically. It will then examine what the implications are when party vehicles for traditional ideologies disappear and the possible risks this entails. Finally, the article considers whether this ideological vacuum has now been filled by a politics of spectacle and media management, and whether France has become a liberal democracy just like any other.

Résumé

La fin du clivage entre gauche et droite est quelque chose qu'on annonce avec une régularité croissante depuis une trentaine d'années. La victoire d'Emmanuel Macron à l'élection présidentielle et la majorité offerte à son parti, la République en Marche, lors des législatives, sembleraient confirmer cette évolution. Cet article analyse, dans un premier temps, l'inadaptation des partis traditionnels de gauche et de droite à la mutation de leurs électorats respectifs et, par conséquent, le manqué d'attractivité de l'offre politique. Ensuite il examine ce qu'implique la disparition des partis pour véhiculer les idéologies classiques et les risques éventuels que cela entraîne. Il termine en demandant si le vide idéologique est maintenant comblé par la politique du spectacle et de la communication, et si la France est devenue une démocratie libérale comme n'importe quelle autre.

Introduction: outsiders from the mainstream

In the rush of near-universal relief at the success of Emmanuel Macron in the second round of the presidential election on 7 May 2017, when he obtained 66.1 per cent of the vote against the 33.9 per cent of his far-right rival Marine Le Pen, it was easy to forget that little more

than a year beforehand, such a result had been inconceivable. In a long interview given to *l'Express* in March 2016, Macron was asked for his opinion on whether the German experience of coalition government had not proved that the old left-right divide had become redundant. Macron's reply was circumspect, underlining the difference in political culture between German parliamentarism and French presidentialism. For Macron, the validity of the left-right distinction would be put to the test in the context of a presidential election, when it was mapped onto the battle over the defining values of the candidates. For him, the traditional labels of partisan politics would provide a superficial gloss over what he saw as the real dividing lines between him and the others seeking to redefine French political life: the response to the challenge of globalisation; the relationship with the EU; the rethinking of productivity; re-imagining the national community; and *laïcité* (Barbier and Lhaïk 2016).

For senior figures in the Parti socialiste (PS) like the foreign minister Laurent Fabius, there had already been ample opportunity to parody the transgressive intentions of Macron, when he referred to him as a 'petit marquis poudré' (Hay 2016). While Macron's future ally and the leader of the centrist MoDem, François Bayrou, was inclined to dismiss the rising star as a 'hologramme' (Mathiot 2017). Yet by the time the presidential rivals faced each other in the second round of the presidential election, France found itself with two outsiders in what had been a field of outsiders, figures who had all, either in a general political sense or in a narrowly party-based sense, crossed the usual frontiers of partisan loyalty. This article will explore how such a development is symptomatic of the way support has shifted beneath the traditional formations of left and right, their failure to adapt to this shift and the significance and risks represented by Macron's apparent triumph over left and right. It will also ask whether a politics beyond left and right may entail the loss of France's specificity as a liberal democracy.

Fragile formations and the politics of division

A window of opportunity for an outsider was created by the disunity at the top of the governing socialist establishment itself. Ministers had begun to turn against their leadership as early as July 2013, when the ecology minister Delphine Batto was forced to give up her portfolio after publicly criticising cuts to her ministry's budget. The ecology party ministers, Cécile Duflot and Pascal Canfin quit in March 2014 after Jean-Marc Ayrault was replaced as prime minister by Manuel Valls, with his more hard-edged approach to economic and social

affairs. This was followed in August by the collective exit of Arnaud Montebourg, Aurélie Filipetti and Benoît Hamon, respectively responsible for the economy, culture and education.

Members at the base of the party had no less reason to feel disenchanted. François Hollande's successful bid for the presidency in May 2012 was followed by a succession of various elections that underlined the declining ability of his party to convince the voters: municipal, European and senatorial in 2014, departmental and regional in 2015, and a number of by-elections. It was the presence of the party at grassroots level that was most affected, with the PS losing control of 162 towns of more than 9000 inhabitants and 24 departments. This loss of representation was particularly costly given the fact that when Hollande came to power the party controlled almost all the regions and over half the country's departments. Profile studies at the local level showed the PS to be 'un parti d'élus', where councillors, advisors and their multiplicity of collaborators accounted for a third of the PS's membership base (Dargent and Rey 2014, 26). As once powerful bastions such as the Fédération du Parti socialiste du Nord began to shrink and see, notably, Hénin-Beaumont turn into a stamping ground for the Front national, the appeal of a PS outsider with a clear opposition to a policy of austerity was more understandable than that of someone pursuing a party line that seemed no fundamentally different to that of the centre-right. Hamon's victory in the Socialist primary in January 2017 with 59 per cent of the vote, as opposed to 41 per cent for Valls, was the triumph of the 'frondeur' or trouble-maker whose views on working time, a universal income and the liberalisation of drug laws bore little or no relation to the official policy of the left in government.

The triumph of Hamon's principal adversary from the mainstream right in the primary elections organised by Les Républicains (LR) on 27 November 2016, had been a handsome one with a 66.5 per cent share of the vote, but it was no less unexpected. For months beforehand it had been predicted that François Fillon would be beaten by his more urbane and centrist rival, Alain Juppé. The surprising 33.5 per cent of votes obtained by Juppé could not, however, be simply attributed to the technical failures in the methods employed by the polling organisations during the campaign. Similarly, the failure of the right to see its candidate through to the second round of the presidential election was not purely due to Fillon's 'seul contre tous' strategy, after the allegations in January 2017 that he had spent public money on fictional jobs for his wife and children. Up to that point, it had been the presidential election the right could not lose; but even in the heady initial phase of Fillon's campaign, the deep divisions in the LR as to what kind of right it represented were barely

concealed. Fillon had long had to endure, not least as his prime minister, the bullying opportunism of Nicolas Sarkozy, who had led the right to power in 2007 by tapping the potential of a ‘Sarko-frontiste’ electorate. More subtly, Fillon had been patronised intellectually by Alain Juppé and his supple brand of economic liberalism. As observers in the wings of his early campaign noted, Fillon was determined to exclude these leading party figures from his rallies as he made a pitch for what he believed to be the right’s core vote. As he put it, speaking of the prospect of inviting Sarkozy and Juppé to attend: ‘surtout pas, ils font perdre des voix’ (Mandonnet 2017, 58).

The paradox of primaries designed to unite parties, simply dividing them further, was due to the fact that the principal parties of the left and right had no ideological cohesion, and a diminishing fit with the constituencies they purported to represent. Hamon and Fillon were the initial winners and the ultimate losers in what might be described as clan politics, the fruit of a failure of representation that was years in the making.

New fractures and a failure of representation

2002 was the last time a Socialist candidate did not make it through to the second round of a presidential election, and an evocation of that failure provides a strong sense of lessons not learned. Writing in the aftermath of that shock result, when the Front National’s Jean-Marie Le Pen beat Lionel Jospin of the PS into the second-round run-off against Jacques Chirac, Eric Conan accused principally the PS, but also the political establishment in general, for having abandoned ordinary French working people ((Conan 2004). For Conan, 2002 was an object lesson in the PS’s failure to understand what was happening to the constituency it was meant to represent, and a warning for the future. From the moment of the FN’s breakthrough in the European elections of 1984, horror at each of its ‘percées’ or electoral highpoints had eventually given way to self-congratulation at the re-assertion of the Republic and its values, such as after the second round of the presidential election of 2002, when Chirac beat Le Pen with the biggest landslide in the Fifth Republic’s history. But according to Conan, this exorcism of the threat from the extreme right masked a development that had set in since the end of Francois Mitterrand’s first mandate as a Socialist president, a permanent ‘vote de rupture’ between the people and the mainstream parties of the political establishment (Conan 2004, 11), a dislocation that was confirmed by the presidential elections of 1995 and 2002.

When the PS came to power in 1981, the bulk of its electorate was made up of workers and public sector employees. By 2002, voting patterns by socio-economic class illustrated just

how much this had changed. Jean-Marie Le Pen garnered 38 per cent of his votes from the unemployed and 30 per cent from the working-class electorate, while the PS's Jospin had fallen behind even the right's Chirac in those categories, counting only 11 per cent of workers and 14 per cent of the unemployed among his electorate. Conversely, Jospin was able to count 24 per cent of the managerial class among his supporters, while that same constituency made up only 13 per cent of Chirac's and eight per cent of Le Pen's supporters. This was perhaps not surprising given that the PS's strategy had been to target the middle class, typically represented by a young family, headed by a couple working in education, with a monthly income of approximately €4600. Such a disposable income was in fact within the reach of only ten per cent of French voters, while the average family has to manage on a monthly income of €2000 or less. As insiders who witnessed the discussions revealed, former Socialist prime minister Pierre Mauroy had to remind Jospin that the use of vocabulary like 'travailleur' and 'ouvrier' in political discourse was not an act of vulgarity (Conan 2004, 24).

The collapse of the working-class vote for the Communist Party, from the days when it could command 36 per cent of that constituency in the 1970s to three per cent in 2002, had long been presaged from within its own ranks. As Jean Elleinstein had defiantly asked in the pages of *Le Monde* in 1978, what did Leninist orthodoxy have to offer the materially ambitious workers of the Paris region, many of whom were property owners? (Raymond 2005, 159). But the obvious need for the established parties of the left to shed their old ideological baggage, seemed to have resulted, in the case of the PS, in the desire to shed the working-class itself. The Marxist-inspired critical paradigm for the understanding of social change was supplanted by the traction offered by new sociological perspectives that focused on social movements rather than social classes and that saw the prospect of change through a diversity of causes: feminist, ecological and a range of other struggles for the recognition of identity and community, in place of the old class struggle for jobs and justice. As the sociologist Louis Chauvel observed at the start of the new millennium, however, classes themselves had not disappeared. But instead of the old class typology, 'classes' now referred more accurately to unequal social groups with unequal social destinies (Chauvel 2001).

The wave of deindustrialisation that hit countries like Britain and France would of course hit the working class first and hardest. But they would also become less clearly identifiable due to the changing perception of the world of work and the vocabulary that developed during this period. As Conan pointed out, workers as voters were being written out of the script in the competition for power as semantic shifts erased the reality of their labour. Thus, for

example, what was left of that sector of the work-force once referred to as ‘ouvriers spécialisés’ was, in the new jargon of human resources, designated as ‘opérateurs d’unité élémentaire de production’, ‘femmes de ménage’ became ‘techniciennes de surface’, and ‘caissières’ were transformed into ‘hôtesses de caisse’ (Conan 2004, 20). This disappearance of working-class employment was exacerbated by the distinctions springing from unequal social destinies that became evident in certain urban populations. One could argue that the governing elite, across the political spectrum, have presided over a situation where class differences have been occluded by a new dividing line between ‘in’ and ‘out’, and those who are ‘in’ or ‘out’ according to the spaces they inhabit (Guilluy 2013, 33).

In his analysis Guilluy indicts the governing Socialists in 1983 for facilitating a vision of urban France that developed into a bi-partisan tendency resulting in the worker being eclipsed by the immigrant. The policy of austerity the Socialists were obliged to adopt saw an economically liberal turn that was also accompanied by a more American-style sociological perspective. Coinciding with the first manifestations of a pattern of violent disorder in ‘la banlieue’, attention began to focus on the actors in this mode of social revolt in terms of their origins as a community. ‘La banlieue’ became ‘la question sociale’ and highlighted the ideological position shared by both left and right. Rather than focusing on the socio-economic challenges faced by the populations of the *banlieue* as workers, the perception of the problems of urban France became ethnicised. For the left, the designation of specific communities in need of support was a way of circumventing their own failure or inability to invest materially in the universalist republican model of equality. For the right, the ethnicisation of the problem of ‘la banlieue’ was a way of exploiting the notion of identity and the politics of mutual mistrust for electoral purposes. As Nicolas Sarkozy famously, or infamously put it, in the France that his potential voters now saw, ‘...le fils de Nicolas et de Cécilia a moins besoin d’être aidé par l’Etat que le fils de Mohamed et Latifa’ (Sarkozy 2004).

But as the new millennium wore on, the relationship between the middle class and the established parties who would represent them also became problematic, as the meaning of what it meant to be middle class came into question. If the very existence of a proletariat was in dispute, the classic perception of the middle class as a kind of shock absorber between the bourgeoisie and the working class was also inadequate. While it could be argued that the burgeoning of the middle class during the ‘trente glorieuses’ expressed the democratisation of aspiration, in social and material terms, the declining means available to achieve those

aspirations was now a source of ‘déstabilisation sociale’ (Chauvel 2006, 99). The ‘trente glorieuses’ had conditioned a strong sense of identification with the middle class, but the economic and social insecurity that followed that period made the traditional criteria for defining that category, such as income and profession, seem increasingly inadequate. It is possible to feel both middle class and ‘déclassé’, particularly for a younger demographic. The ‘inversion générationnelle’ that presents itself most pointedly in urban France, among the young whose life chances appear more limited than those enjoyed by their parents, is part of a broader split that could be described as a ‘fracture générationnelle’. In comfortable suburbs and provincial towns, there is a constituency that has striven according to the meritocratic blueprint of the Republic and gained the qualifications to prove it, but that in contrast to the housing and job security enjoyed by its parents’ generation, finds itself prey ‘à l’aléatoire et à l’arbitraire’ (Chauvel 2006, 56).

The mainstream right in postwar France gathered its middle-class support around three principal poles of attraction: Gaullist, Christian-democrat and liberal. The fading attraction of the first two poles in particular appeared to be compensated for by the new ideological impetus given to the right by Sarkozy in 2007. Chirac’s election in 2002 had been the largest landslide in the Fifth Republic and also the hollowest of victories. His preceding victory in 1995 had been achieved, as his most astute biographer pointed out, with barely more than 20 percent of the right’s core vote in the first round, and in spite of his acknowledgement of ‘la fracture sociale’, Chirac’s inability to effect change had reduced him to the role of ‘résident’ rather than a transformational president of the Republic (Colombani 1998).

As his successor, and with the guidance of close advisers such as Emmanuelle Mignon, Henri Guaino and Patrick Buisson, Sarkozy exploited the fact that divisions between electorates are far more permeable than divisions between party apparatuses. The pulling together of different partisan tendencies into a vehicle, the Union pour un mouvement populaire (UMP) in 2002, capable of carrying the right to power again, appeared justified by Sarkozy’s radicalised appeal across the right-wing spectrum. But the great strength of the UMP as a campaigning machine at election time, could not disguise the fact that when not in campaign mode the party alternated, as Florence Haegel observes, between phases of competition and cooperation (Haegel 2012, 127). The price of victory in 2007, notably the personalisation of power by Sarkozy, would provoke the emergence of counter-vailing forces that would not be neutralised by the transformation of the UMP into Les Républicains in 2015. The ensuing competition between partisan tendencies would see the party divide between a metropolitan

liberal tendency, a socially conservative provincialism, and a penchant for identity politics not greatly removed from the far right.

As for the PS, returned to power in 2012, its inability to bring about change would rapidly become evident. Promises to halt the ravages of globalisation proved hollow for the employees at the foreign-owned steelworks in Florange, in spite of François Hollande's highly mediated visit to support them in the battle against its closure. Furthermore, the string of financial scandals that had dogged the Sarkozy presidency found an echo in the tax fraud perpetrated by the budget minister Jérôme Cahuzac, when he admitted to examining magistrates in March 2013 that he had hidden over €600,000 in a Swiss bank account. The PS had failed to shed the perception of it as a 'bourgeoisie d'Etat' (Conan 2004, 235), and for both the mainstream left and right, the conditions were ripe for their electorates to turn a deaf ear to the call to rally behind them in the two great electoral contests of 2017.

Residual contradictions and influences of left and right

As Michel Winock (2012) has pointed out, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the emergence of China as an economic superpower propelled by state-directed capitalism, and the impact of globalisation on decision-making by ostensibly sovereign states, has made the old opposition between a free-market right and a statist left something that belonged to the fixed ideological contours of the 1970s. Since the 1980s, governments of left and right have found themselves with ever-narrower margins for manoeuvre and their differences have rested on the interpretation of reform, rather than antithetical visions for the transformation of society. This has been accompanied by the emergence of what might be termed the 'électeur stratège' rather than the 'électeur d'appartenance' (Winock 2012, 219). In other words, voter behaviour is no longer conditioned by belonging to a political family, milieu or class, but aligned with pragmatic choices reflecting shifting individual interests.

This evolution has forced mainstream parties of left and right to loosen, if not abandon, their ties to traditional ideological positions. But this apparently rational adjustment to post-ideological realities throws up its own contradictions. The right in power promotes an economic system that underpins the triumph of individualism, while at the same time it opposes the individualism which it holds to be inimical to the preservation of the collective moral, and even spiritual, values that provide a sense of shared republican identity and fuel the dynamic pursuit of national greatness. Conversely, the left defends the personalisation of

social mores, challenges the notion of hierarchies and promotes the relativisation of values, all of which are developments that are stimulated by economic and cultural globalisation. These contradictions were played out in the ranks of Les Républicains and the PS in the prelude to the presidential contest. In the opposition between Juppé and Fillon we saw the contrast between a liberal sensibility of the right that was more open and pluralist, confronted by republicanism of the right that was more wedded to the preservation of national specificities even, if necessary, at the expense of the unhindered movement of people required by the free market. In the competition between Valls and Hamon, the former represented a modernising left that no longer saw the operations of international capital as invariably detrimental to the interests of the ordinary citizen, and this was exemplified by the visit by Valls to London in 2014 when he proclaimed to the financiers of the City, ‘My government is pro-business!’ (AFP 2014). Some weeks earlier, however, Hamon had articulated a very traditional ‘ouvrieriste’ conviction in defence of the purchasing power of ordinary French working families. Putting his future as education minister on the line, he criticised ‘l’isolement de Mme Merkel’ in her single-minded pursuit of austerity for the eurozone (Gradt 2014).

Residual tendencies, nonetheless, continue to express themselves, actively or passively. Generations of partisan conditioning will not allow the antagonism between left and right to be entirely erased by the pragmatic pursuit of managerial solutions to political challenges. The archetypes of left and right will continue to need to define themselves in opposition to each other. For the apostle of left-wing values, the individual of the right will continue to be defender of the rich, of the bosses, the enemy of the unions and generally subservient to the ruling class. For the apostle of the right, the left-wing adversary will remain obsessed with the ideal of equality, wedded to the redistribution of wealth rather than its production, and consequently incapable of doing anything other than squandering the money earned by taxpayers once in government.

Questions therefore arise as to who will speak for these apparently ossified constituencies, how narrowly circumscribed they truly are, whether they can reanimate themselves as poles of attraction, and what form their activity would take on the political landscape. As the parties of Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Marine Le Pen discovered in the parliamentary election, or what some commentators have called the third round of the presidential election, nothing other than a system of proportional representation would allow the grassroots support for them as presidential candidates to be translated into seats in the contest for representation in

the National Assembly. Conversely, the stunning performance, first of Macron, then of La République en Marche (REM) in the parliamentary election, may seem to justify the assertion that the old ideological divides are now of little relevance to the success of a liberal and democratic France equipped for success in the twenty-first century. But the record abstention rates in both presidential and parliamentary elections suggest that such a judgement needs to be nuanced.

Abstentionism has been growing for 30 years and notwithstanding Macron's handsome margin of success, one in four voters refused to come out for the second round, while one in two voters refused to take part in returning a new majority to the Assembly. Looking across the electoral body as a whole, underlying Macron's 66.1 percent share of the vote in the second round of the presidential contest was the fact that while 20 million of his fellow-citizens voted for him, 11 million voted for Marine Le Pen, 12 million refused to come to the ballot box, and of those who did four million voted 'blanc' or 'nul'. It was, in short, far from an unequivocal endorsement (*Challenges* 2017). These raw statistics, allied with those from the parliamentary election, illustrate what can be a gaping disparity between an electoral victory and a genuinely democratic consensus. To ignore it may lead to the cultivation of an illusion of national unity, and the reluctance to acknowledge the persistence of what Emmanuel Todd (2015) has called 'zombie' constituencies (notably the remains of the Catholic right), in his excoriating analysis of the mobilisation in defence of republican values after the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*. But the idea of a 'zombie' constituency could be applied more broadly to describe those socio-economic categories of voters who no longer, or never did, find a party vehicle to carry their aspirations, and who therefore represent a potential factor of social and political instability.

Left and Right eclipsed by politics as spectacle?

A question prompted by Macron's success is whether the highly mediatised charisma of a new leader is enough to replace the dynamic for change once provided by traditional partisan politics. The romance of Manu and Bibi was the narrative of a formerly forbidden love that began to fill the pages of the press, along with the more strictly political analyses that charted Macron's meteoric rise. It seemed to provide a successful synthesis to the progress of politics as spectacle that gripped both right and left during the two previous presidential mandates, and then left them behind. From his beginnings as a government minister and through to his

acquisition of presidential power, Sarkozy had shown an insatiable appetite for the media limelight, inviting and, as a consequence, enduring its scrutiny even into the most private aspects of his life. Even as his presidential campaign was reaching a climax in 2007, Sarkozy was playing an elaborate game with the media, smuggling himself into the family apartment so that he and his wife Cécilia could emerge together before the cameras on the way to cast their votes, although they had effectively stopped living together (Nay 2012). This psychodrama of marital discord reached a paroxysm on the night of Sarkozy's triumph, when doubts remained until the last moment as to whether Cécilia would attend. Her eventual appearance for the celebration at Fouquet's restaurant on the Champs Elysées merely heightened the impression of an event styled like a reality show for a cast later described as 'le Who's Who de l'argent' (Giesbert 2011, 72). The convulsions of the Sarkozy marriage continued to be played out in the media until the final one was conveyed via a text message leaked first to the website of *Le Nouvel Observateur* and which then went viral. 'Si tu reviens, j'annule tout', was the desperate plea from the president to his wife, promising to call off the budding relationship with Carla Bruni if she would come back to him (*Libération* 2008). Sarkozy's subsequent attempt consciously to develop a narrative of rejuvenation and renewed marital bliss, under the media spotlight, with his new and beautiful young wife would, however, fail. Rather than being a successful exercise in bringing the presidency closer to the people it sprang, as one of Sarkozy's erstwhile close collaborator cruelly observes, from the psychological need to compensate for the recent experience 'du cocufiage at du lâchage' inflicted by Cécilia (Buisson 2016, 85).

A defining characteristic of Hollande's campaign to defeat Sarkozy in the presidential election of 2012 was its studied normality, based on an identification with the preferences and experiences of ordinary voters. In reality, Hollande and his partner, Ségolène Royal, were typical metropolitan bourgeois bohemians, who had four children while eschewing the conventions of marriage, had met at the supremely elitist *École Nationale d'Administration*, and spent their entire working lives in the rarefied circles of the governing elite. According to the woman who replaced Royal in Hollande's affections, Valérie Trierweiler, the new Socialist president was no less susceptible to glamour than his right-wing predecessor. Barely had he taken possession of the Elysée palace before rumours reached her ears of his liaison with a celebrity (Trierweiler 2014). It was the gossip magazine *Closer* that broke the story of Hollande's liaison with the actress Julie Gayet on its cover when it published pictures of the President on a scooter attempting to visit her apartment unnoticed (*Closer* 2014).

Any residual feeling of sympathy for Hollande, especially in the Socialist camp, as someone who was a naive victim of a rapacious media machine, evaporated as his mandate drew to a close. It emerged that over the course of 61 encounters during his term in office, Hollande had given two reporters from *Le Monde* unprecedented access to his thoughts, and although he had no editorial control over the ensuing book, the idea that this was not an attempt to appeal to a disenchanted electorate on a human level would appear disingenuous. The contradiction in portraying himself to hand-picked journalists as ‘un homme en pleine détresse’ over the media revelation of his affair with Gayet, while being at the same time ‘obsédé par la préservation de son intimité’ (Davet and Lhomme 2016, 145), was just one of many incongruities in the publication that could not be overlooked. The storm of adverse reaction was summed up by an exasperated PS official: ‘Mais quand est-ce qu’il bosse?...Il devrait faire une psychanalyse...Il n’est pas fait pour ce job’ (Djamshidi and Martinat 2016).

When Macron invited a film crew to follow his inner circle as they planned a winning strategy for En Marche !, he spoke unequivocally of his desire to transform the old contours of the political landscape shaped by the conflict of left and right, even if that entailed the kind of shock implied by his expression, ‘bousculer par le progressisme’ (*Envoyé Spécial* 2017). This cultivation of a relationship with the media was also an invitation to dramatise his personal conquest of power. The idealisation of the personal and the ‘scénarisation’ of one’s life were essential factors identified by Morin in the advent of a culture of stardom (Morin 1972). Far better than Sarkozy or Hollande, Macron understood the dynamic relationship between the public and its stars; not merely the passive need by the public to absorb the magic but the desire to invest in it and appropriate it as part of one’s life. What could have been a tabloid tale of a provincial schoolteacher seducing a student who was the same age as her children, became a postmodern version of the eternal fable of love triumphing against all odds. The decision to recruit Michèle Marchand, chief executive of the agency *Bestimage*, to shape the public perception of Emmanuel and Brigitte as a couple, resulted in the series of images in *Paris Match* that was crowned on the cover with the strikingly handsome picture of the couple on the beach under the title, ‘Vacances en amoureux avant l’offensive’ (*Paris Match* 2016). Macron became the figure who not only personified progress beyond old political divides, but who also overcame traditional social cleavages and even taboos. In the publicity he had given to his relationship with Brigitte, Macron had broken both a generational and a gender bias, and embodied the ethos of a movement that was nothing if not the promise of change. Appealing in particular to a demographic whose cultural frame of

reference was global rather than Gallic, Macron incorporated into the established symbolism of the Republic the ritual gestures associated with a liberal democracy where the ideological underpinnings of left and right have very shallow foundations. Standing hand on heart when the national hymn is played, and the professed desire to define a formal role for Brigitte as ‘first lady’, could be perceived as symptomatic of civilizational change that, among other things, has led to the Americanisation of the French presidency (Debray 2017).

Conclusion: the end of French specificity?

As we have explored in this article, the traditional portrait of the left during the life of the Fifth republic has been profoundly altered. The class-based rhetoric of the French Communist Party has been hijacked by Mélenchon and his movement. Having challenged the PS from within, leading ‘frondeurs’ have now abandoned the ship they wanted to steer. Hamon himself announced on 1 July 2017 that he was quitting the party, but not socialism or socialists, to head his own movement. This came after the announcement on 27 June from Hamon’s leading ‘réformiste’ adversary in the PS, Valls, that he too was leaving the party to sit with the REM majority in the new Assembly. On the same day too, Olivier Faure, the leader of the PS group announced that he and his fellow Socialist deputies had decided to operate under the label of ‘Nouvelle gauche’. For the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic, the term ‘Socialist’ would no longer figure in the designation of a left-wing group in the National Assembly. As for the right, a painful ‘dégagisme’ had put paid to the ambitions of Sarkozy, Juppé and Fillon, and only the vitriolic incompetence of Marine Le Pen seemed to prevent a greater eclipse by her and her party in terms of the ability to secure popular support at the ballot-box. What is left of Les Républicains as a force in the Assembly appears uneasily divided between the ‘constructifs’ who want a more open and progressive right prepared to work with the government, and those guided by a more rigorous understanding of right-wing opposition.

Thirty years before Macron’s triumph, three of France’s most perceptive observers stoked a debate on France’s specificity, suggesting that the celebration of the bicentenary of the Revolution was also the metaphorical deployment of a burial shroud, signalling the end of the way the Revolution had shaped the operation of the French polity and how that polity perceived itself. For Pierre Rosanvallon in particular, surveying the culture of party politics, the ‘fonction d’intégration nationale par les grandes familles politiques’ was failing (Furet,

Julliard and Rosavallon 1988, 151). An ability to progress beyond the simplistic battles of left versus right was long overdue, and Macron's success may seem to justify the argument that France has shed the specificity that prevented it from adopting the more supple approach to change characteristic of other liberal democracies. Macron's social-liberalism might well have emerged from the left and been shaped by progressive cultural and societal values, but it was also reconciled to market forces and embraced globalisation. It appears to some, to be a French version of the synthesis achieved by Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder, at a time when Jospin was failing to convince the electorate to invest in the PS's version of social democracy, as evidenced by his inability to reach the second round of the presidential election in 2002.

Surveys of the rejection of traditional ideologies and party cleavages in other liberal democracies, however, do not mean that national specificities cease to operate as determining factors. The blue collar workers of the rust belt, seemingly abandoned by the Democrats in the United States (Frank 2016), are highly dissimilar to the disillusioned left and right-wing constituencies in the UK who feel their need to belong is ignored (Goodhart 2017). While they, in turn, would not correspond to the constituency in France that succumbed to the identity politics exploited by Sarkozy and then Fillon as presidential candidates. It is noteworthy that both Macron and his observers reference the traditions of left and right to characterise his actions and attitudes. Hence some refer to Macron as a Jupiter-like figure, in a manner reminiscent of the 'Mitterrandolâtrie' of the 1980s, when Mitterrand seemed to exercise a god-like control over political life. Other commentators see a restoration of the republican monarchy tailored for Charles de Gaulle, even with some stylistic elements of the audacious young Napoleon's rescue of a fragile Republic. As for Macron himself, he is not averse to evoking the glory days of the European adventure, with himself cast as Mitterrand and Merkel as Helmut Kohl, as he picks up the challenge of leading the EU to a brighter future (Encaoua 2017). This may be simply because of the absence of a centrist mythology, given the centre's failure to assume power under the Fifth Republic, or the fundamental difficulty of arriving at a stable definition of what constitutes a progressive centre (Julliard 2017).

It is possible to take a sanguine view of the 2017 change that has largely swept the traditional left/right formations from the political landscape in what has been described as a form of 'destruction créatrice' (Duhamel 2017). The party political establishment will be forced to renew itself but the constitution will prove its durability, just as it did in the past. After all, the institutions of the Republic adapted to the first election of a president by universal

suffrage in 1965, the first *alternance* in 1981, the first *cohabitation* in 1986 and the first *quinquennat* in 2002. It is also possible to take the opposite view and see the success of Macron and REM as a symptom of a deeper problem. Macron has attracted much attention for his apparent desire to micro-manage everything, from the photographers' access to the Elysée palace garden for the new administration's official photo, to the responsibilities for the conduct of the National Assembly's business. But if this post-ideological management of the country's fortunes fails to progress beyond what has been characterised as the alternating and destabilising phases of soft consensus and corporatist conflict, then Fitoussi and Rosanvallon may be proved correct in their observation that 'Les Français n'arrivent pas à vivre ordinairement les conflits et les divisions' (1996, 64). If so, Mélenchon will not be the only one to see Macron's triumph as the realisation of the long-held ambition of the *deuxième gauche*, the monopolisation of power by the kind of managerial, economically liberal socialism Michel Rocard had attempted to establish in the PS, but this time also with the presumption of EU technocrats. In either case, we will know by 2022.

References

- AFP. 2014. 'Valls à la City: "My Government is Pro-Business!"' *Le Point*, October 6. Accessed 13 June 2017. http://www.lepoint.fr/politique/valls-a-la-city-my-gouvernement-is-pro-business-06-10-2014-1869754_20.php
- Barbier, Christophe and Corinne Lhaïk. 2016. 'Ce que je veux.' *l'Express*, 9–15 March, 52–64.
- Buisson, Patrick 2016. *La cause du peuple. L'Histoire interdite de la présidence Sarkozy*. Paris: Perrin.
- Challenges. 2017. 'Record d'abstention et votes blanc : pas de chèque en blanc.' 8 May. Accessed 4 June 2017. https://www.challenges.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/presidentielle-2017-record-d-abstention-et-votes-balnacs-un-avertissement_471838
- Chauvel, Louis. 2001. 'Le retour des classes sociales?' *Revue de l'Observatoire français des conjonctures économiques*, October.
- Chauvel, Louis. 2006. *Les classes moyennes à la dérive*. Paris: Seuil.

- Closer. 2014. 'L'Amour secret du président', 10 January.
- Colombani, Jean Marie. 1998. *Le Résident de la République*. Paris : Stock.
- Conan, Eric. 2004. *La gauche sans le peuple*. Paris: Fayard.
- Dargent, Claude and Henri Rey. 2014. *Sociologie des adhérents socialistes*. Les Cahiers du CEPIVOF, December, No. 59. Paris: Sciences Po.
- Davet, Gérard and Fabrice Lhomme. 2016. *Un président ne devrait pas dire ça*. Paris: Stock.
- Debray, Régis. 2017. *Civilisation*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Djamshidi, Ava and Philippe Martinat. 2016. 'Un président ne devrait pas dire ça : ces pages qui ébranlent la hollandie.' *Le Parisien*, 13 October.
- Duhamel, Alain. 2017. 'La destruction créatrice du système des partis.' *Libération*, June 28. Accessed 3 July 2017. http://www.liberation.fr/debats/2017/06/28/la-destruction-creatrice-du-systeme-des-partis_1580214
- Encaoua, Myriam. 2017. 'Macron-Merkel, le retour du couple franco-allemand.' *Le Parisien*, June 24.
- Envoyé Spécial*. 2017. *France 2*, 11 May.
- Fitoussi, Jean-Paul and Pierre Rosanvallon. 1996. *Le nouvel âge des inégalités*. Paris : Seuil.
- Frank, Thomas. 2016. *Listen, Liberal: or, whatever happened to the party of the people?* New York : Scribe.
- Furet, François, Jacques Julliard and Pierre Rosanvallon. 1988. *La république du centre*. Paris : Calmann-Lévy.
- Giesbert, Franz-Olivier. 2011. *M. Le Président*. Paris: Flammarion.
- Goodhart, David. 2017. *The Road to Somewhere*. London : Hurst & Co.
- Gradt, Jean-Michel. 2014. 'Benoît Hamon: les déclarations qui pourrait lui coûter son poste.' *Les Échos*, 25 August. Accessed 13 June 2017. https://www.lesechos.fr/25/08/2014/lesechos.fr/0203721730574_benoit-hamon---les-declarations-qui-pourrait-lui-couter-son-poste.htm#
- Guilluy, Christophe. 2013. *Fractures françaises*. Paris: Flammarion.

- Haegel, Florence. 2012. *Les droites en fusion. Transformations de l'UMP*. Paris: Sciences Po.
- Hay, Jean-Christian, 2016. 'Laurent Fabius traite Emmanuel Macron de petit marquis poudré.'" *Gala*, 14 January. Accessed 6 July 2017. http://www.gala.fr/l_actu/news_de_stars/laurent_fabius_traite_emmanuel_macron_de_petit_marquis_poudre_357763
- Julliard, Jacques. 2017. 'L'heure du centre ?' *Le Figaro*, 6 March.
- Libération*. 2008. 'Sarkozy à Cécilia: "Si tu reviens, j'annule tout"', 6 February. Accessed 26 June 2017. <http://www.liberation.fr/france/2008/02/06/sarkozy>
- Mandonnet, Eric. 2017. 'Le calvaire de Fillon.' *L'Express*, 28 April, 58–61.
- Mathiot, Cédric. 2017. 'Ah bon, Bayrou critiquait Macron? Il a tout oublié!' *Libération*, February 23. Accessed 6 July 2017. http://www.liberation.fr/politiques.2017/02/23/ah-bon-bayrou-critiquait-macron-il-a-tout-oublie_1550449
- Morin, Edgar. 1972. *Les Stars*. Paris: Le Seuil.
- Nay, Catherine. 2012. *L'Impetueux*, Paris: Grasset.
- Paris Match*. 2016. 'Emmanuel & Brigitte Macron: vacances en amoureux avant l'offensive', August 10.
- Raymond, Gino G. 2005. *The French Communist Party During the Fifth Republic*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sarkozy, Nicolas. 2004. 'Université du MEDEF de 2004.' *Libération*, 31 August.
- Todd, Emmanuel. 2015. *Qui est Charlie ? Sociologie d'une crise religieuse*. Paris : Seuil.
- Trierweiler, Valérie. 2014. *Merci pour ce moment*. Paris: Les Arènes.
- Winock, Michel. 2012. *La droite hier et aujourd'hui*. Paris: Perrin.